

84
D. Bham
Vol 32
Dupch
7

THE
NATURE AND DUTIES
OF
THE OFFICE
OF A
MINISTER OF RELIGION;

ALSO,
THE IMPIETY, INJUSTICE, AND ABSURDITY OF
PERSECUTION,

CONSIDERED IN
A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED BEFORE
THE CONGREGATIONS
OF

The New and Old Meetings.

AND PUBLISHED AT THEIR UNITED REQUEST.

By David Jones,

Neither as being lords over God's heritage. PETER.

But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost
thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand
before the judgment seat of Christ. PAUL.

=====

Birmingham,

PRINTED BY J. THOMPSON.

SOLD BY J. JOHNSON, NO. 72, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-
YARD, LONDON.

=====

MDCCXCII.

Sup
1405



TO

THE MEMBERS

OF

The New and Old Meeting Societies,

THIS DISCOURSE,

PUBLISHED AT THEIR REQUEST,

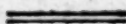
Is respectfully inscribed,

BY

THE AUTHOR.

b
p
fr
n
th
n
an
o
fw
N
on
li
T
h
n
h
it
w
to
fe
po
fic

THE PREFACE.



IN the following discourse, it will be seen, that I consider ministers merely as public instructors, and as deriving their functions wholly from the people. I see no reason to make any distinction between them and the rest of the christian community; for we have abundant proofs that they are of like passions and inclinations with other men; that interest bears as great a sway in their breasts as in those of others. Nor does any blame fall to their share on this account, as they are composed of like materials with other human beings. The too great importance of which they have been made, and their supposed sacredness, have materially diserved religion; it has hence been regarded, not as it is in itself, transcendentally excellent, and replete with consolation, but, viewed in its relation to this set of men, sullied by their imperfections and vices, allied to their lust of power, and their eternal jealousies; considered as their craft, the instrument of their

particular ambition; by which means its profession has been confined, and its true and proper influence checked. A public teacher, who is assiduous in the discharge of his duty, humble and unassuming in his general behaviour, is as much entitled to respect as any other useful member of society, and will always be sure to meet with it. But any thing more than this proceeds from superstition, and is of pernicious consequence; nor would ministers, by declining it, deprive themselves of any thing of value. Usurped power, and usurped privileges, are no real advantage; pure, genuine happiness is only to be found within the line of truth and justice. Priests of all religions have been the bane of the world, the enemies of its peace, and the embodied adversaries of truth and liberty. Religious instructors should have no exclusive privileges; their vocation, like others, should be estimated by its utility and importance. They should leave to those who love such things, fictitious sacredness, artificial consequence, priestly reverence, and ecclesiastical privileges: it should be their ambition to possess the sacredness that attends genuine worth, the consequence that belongs to estimable qualities, and useful acquirements, the

the reverence due to the good man, and the respectability of the upright and exemplary citizen.

No person can be more sensible than I am of the value of just religious notions, nor feel warmer gratitude towards those illustrious advocates of free inquiry and free discussion, to whose labours we owe the diffusion of liberal and amiable views of christianity. I imagine, however, that this is not the moment for disquisitions of that nature; considerable changes in the civil state of things must, I apprehend, precede their producing any signal effects. If immorality cannot be put a stop to, while government turns vice to account, while political corruption militates against principle, and while the education of so many of our fellow citizens is neglected, no more will error be overturned; nor will pure doctrines gain the ascendancy while temptations are held out to prevaricate, stronger than what flesh and blood can ordinarily resist. But let such civil arrangements be made as that no man will be tempted to deviate from truth; to go, in any case, against his judgment and his conscience; let him have no interest to take up one set of opinions
in

in preference to another, and all glaring errors and offensive doctrines will speedily sink into discredit, and systems which are in the main right, will become universally prevalent. It is then to be wished that free course should be allowed to the political investigations lately set on foot. It is our duty, calmly and dispassionately to examine them; and if it appear that essential good is likely to accrue from them, we should give them every encouragement. Let us not set our faces against improvements, under the specious pretext of resisting innovations. This was the plea of those who continued pagans after they had heard the glad tidings of the gospel; of papists*, after Luther and Calvin had set up reformation; and of Jacobites, when the nation broke through

* The persons here referred to, were very different from the modern catholics, who are, I believe, as worthy members of society as those of any other sect whatever. Indeed, I know of no injustice, into which party spirit hurries persons, more glaring, than is that of confounding the members of a sect at one period, with those of a preceding one. How different are modern presbyterians from those of former times! they reject the creed of their ancestors; they hold their manners in no admiration; and think it no crime to indulge in amusements which their austerity proscribed; and yet there are men who still confound them together, who yet would be extremely angry were we to charge on the members of the present church of England, the principles and views of those of the time of Archbishop Laud.

the

the line of succession, in favour of William III. Let us act the part of rational beings; let us not condemn without examination; let us not judge till we fully comprehend the case; lest we be found thwarting the designs of providence, and fighting against God.

As we regard our common interests, the welfare of our country, and our credit with posterity, let us bury our religious animosities. Let not party distinctions be known; let not party names be heard in the common intercourse of life. Let the public frown pursue the man that acts the churchman or the presbyterian, the methodist or the catholic, in civil transactions: in these, let us know one another, and be known, as men and as citizens. Let the people grow ashamed of making themselves, by their puerile contentions and local broils, at once the sport and the instrument of the advocates of corruption, who know how to turn their follies to account: there is no order, the welfare of which is of so much consequence as theirs. Let the people then render themselves respectable, as their cause is respectable; there is no cause so dignified as theirs; every cause set in opposition to it, must sink,
and

PREFACE.

and ought to sink. Let us be ashamed to permit religious differences to interrupt good neighbourhood, to impede the success of salutary regulations, the progress of useful schemes, or the advancement of any great cause. Corrupt men, who profit by abuses, are securing every avenue to our breasts, in order to divide us, and to divert our attention from our true interests. Religious jealousies, are what they have ever wished to excite; this they have ever found a fruitful resource: for the future let us disappoint their hopes. I wish every well-intentioned man would for one twelvemonth lay aside religious animosity, and live with men of different sects as if they were all of his way of thinking; he never would take to it again, but be amazed at his folly in ever giving way to it. He would find the *churchman*, the *quaker*, the *presbyterian*, the *baptist*, the *methodist*, and the *catholic*, all possessed of good qualities, all valuable citizens; and he would, in time, view them worship God in their own way, with as much satisfaction as he does those who frequent his church. To honest and well-meaning high-churchmen, who, I believe it will be allowed, are most likely to err against the advice now given, I would beg leave to suggest a few hints.

hints. I wish not to offend them. In the character of those of them with whom I have had the happiness to be acquainted, I have seen much to admire. I am as willing as any one to do justice to their openness; their sense of honour, and of propriety; I discover in them nothing contemptible but their bigotry. Let them reflect how unbecoming is a proud and haughty demeanour towards those who differ from them, in the members of the smallest public religion in Christendom. Let them coolly consider, whether they have any ground to lament the existence of dissenters; whether this be an evil which they are patiently to bear, or a good which calls for their gratitude. Were I disposed to indulge in pleasantry, I would ask, Are the bishops, when they preach, less followed? are they reduced to abjectness of behaviour, or does the mitre go a begging because there are dissenters? Have the clergy too little power, are they unable to collect their tithes and their dues because there are dissenters? This I believe has rarely been the case; I do not recollect hearing of any complaints of this kind. Let us survey the countries of Europe, and see which are most flourishing; in which is the condition
of

of men most happy; which has the preference in this respect, those states in which there is but one religion, or those where there is a diversity of sects? Let us look over this kingdom, and see whether the towns that include a variety of sects, or those where there are none, are the most distinguished by their commerce and manufactures. Had there been but one religion in this country, might not those who now ill-treat dissenters, themselves have groaned under the overgrown power of the clergy? Had there been no dissenters, what cause would have prevented the clergy of England being as corrupt as to morals, and as arbitrary in behaviour, as their brethren of France? Let the clerical oppression, the inactivity and poverty, which characterize countries in which is but one faith; let the individual independence, the industry and wealth, observable in states which allow diversity of religious sentiments, equally contribute to produce cordiality and brotherly love towards dissenters. When they are represented as enemies to establishments, it is generally supposed that they are hostile to the religion of the members of the establishment. This is by no means the case: they only

only object to the manner in which it is supported; believing that it ought to be maintained solely by those who profess it; that, in this respect, it ought to be on the same footing with the respective religions of the other sects. They conceive that this, so far from being an injury, would be a real advantage to it as a religious concern. It is easily seen what favourable influence it would have on the conduct of ministers, and the interest which the people would take in their religion.

The political conduct of the dissenters will, in general, be allowed to have been much to their credit. Let us recur to it in some late events. A majority of them gave a decided opposition to the American war. They also opposed strenuously the setting up a new aristocratic power, attempted by the coalition administration. In this conduct they have a right to pride themselves. They have hailed the dawn of liberty in France; they have been its warm friends and advocates. Whether they will have a claim to the gratitude of their countrymen for ensuring the cordiality of a mighty nation, rising to unheard of power and renown, or have
been

been guilty of the indiscretion of having publicly expressed complacency in the unsuccessful, but nevertheless laudable, attempt of a great people to shake off the yoke of tyranny, and to regenerate itself, time will shew. At present, it may be premature to pass a judgment. At this moment, I presume, that those who are most disposed to censure them, would not be solicitous to give in their verdict. Dissenters are lovers of liberty ; but, at the same time, lovers of order ; friends of reformation, but have no interest in confusion ; advocates of a free government, but have as much to dread as any other set of honest citizens, from anarchy. If they wish changes, it is to serve the general welfare, and not for any private views. Among those who, in the present day, espouse the cause of liberty, and who seek its extension, they will be found not to be the least temperate, nor the least disinterested. In the mass of these, mixed with the phalanx of the friends of freedom, they wish to pass unobserved. To second good public designs, rather than be foremost in them, they consider as their province. Far am I from intimating that they have no faults ; but I am justified in saying,

saying, that within a very short space of time, they have made rapid improvements. I believe that at present there is no cause on which they set so high a value as general liberty; and that they would wish no civil privileges which were not shared by persons of all other religious persuasions equally with themselves. Let us be less churchmen and less dissenters, and more christians; let us strive to excel in promoting public happiness. At the shrine of our country's welfare, let us make a sacrifice of our private interests, of our prejudices, and our self-love. Let there be but two parties, the good and the bad, the sober and the profligate, the honest and the unprincipled. These are the only distinctions worthy of being kept up in an enlightened age. Others might appear of moment in an infant state of things, but it is time they should grow obsolete; they ought long to have been out of date. If any be ambitious to demonstrate the superior excellence of their religious notions, let this be done by a superior generosity of conduct, and a greater disinterestedness of behaviour. Let him who judges another, who calls his brother fool, and who speaks ill of his neighbour, be deemed

deemed a disgrace to his religion, and a nuisance in society, whatever be the cause he professes to support. Let wise, virtuous, and peaceable men, be entitled to due consideration, however wide their religion may be of the standard of fashion, and however short their creeds may fall of the heights of reputed orthodoxy!

A DISCOURSE

A DISCOURSE
OF THE
NATURE AND DUTIES
OF
THE OFFICE
OF A
Minister of Religion, &c.

MY CHRISTIAN BRETHREN,

YOUR having united together for the purposes of religious worship while your several churches are erecting, is an event which does you as much honour, as it gives pleasure and satisfaction to every lover of that spirit of christian charity, which the Gospel breathes and enforces; an event which shews that there are christians who, though they may differ in lesser things*, can yet draw cordially together, not only in common affairs, but also in those more important ones of religious worship and instruction; who, though zealous for the opinions which distinguish them, can yet associate together to listen to, and to recommend those great truths and duties which constitute

* These differences I have since learned may be said to exist rather between the members of each congregation than between the congregations themselves. This, to their honour be it mentioned, does not at all interrupt the harmony of either society.

the essence of their common faith. This circumstance, while we continue in this state, I hope always to keep in mind when I appear in this place. At present I am necessitated to beg permission to regard only one part of my audience, I mean the Members of that Society which has done me the honour to invite me to exercise in it the pastoral office in conjunction with its present worthy minister. Most, however, of the points which I shall discuss are of general concernment, and happy shall I be, if the part of my audience not immediately concerned, think not that its time has been wholly thrown away: The words on which these will be founded, are those of Paul, 2 Cor. i. 24.

Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy.

Two subjects have struck me as most directly offering themselves to be treated of on the present occasion; these are, the nature and end of the office of a minister of religion, and the difficulties to which in certain situations, those who exercise it are subject.

Before I treat of the nature and duties of the ministerial office, it will be proper to state the ends we propose to be answered, when we form ourselves into religious societies.

We form ourselves into religious societies for the purposes of religious worship and edification.

Believing

Believing in the existence of one infinitely powerful, wise, and benevolent Being; admitting the several dispensations recorded in the scriptures to be of divine authority; being also conscious of capacities whereby we may cherish reverence, gratitude and love for this great Being; persuaded, farther, that it is pleasing to him to receive from us these offerings of the heart, we publicly, as well as privately, profess our dependance upon him, and present him with our homage. Accustomed to take these methods of testifying our respect to created excellence, let it not be to any a matter of surprize, that we regard it as a suggestion of nature, as a dictate of reason, to observe the same conduct towards excellence that is infinite and uncreated, unchangeable and eternal*.

In addition to these reasons in behalf of the practice of worshipping the Being who made us, who preserves us in life, and under whose government we live; there are likewise others which may be adduced in its support, and which carry with them irresistible force, namely, those which are drawn from the good consequences which attend it, consequences not to be attained in any other way.

It is solely by this means that a disposition to regard our maker in all our ways is formed, that lively impressions of his transcendant perfections are

* *I hold religion to be a natural propensity of the mind.*

Barlow's Letter to the National Convention, p. 27.

received, that an inclination to imitate them is produced, and that ardent desires, to act upon those great maxims of justice, and benevolence which guide the divine proceedings, are kindled. What can enhance more the value of devotion, what can more recommend the practice of it than these most desirable effects which uniformly result from it? Philanthropy, also, must rejoice in the equality which is to be seen perfect no where except in the assemblies where God is worshipped; here the distinctions which society has created vanish; the rich and the poor, the lord and the domestic, rulers and private citizens appear on a level at the footstool of the supreme Lord of heaven and earth, a situation at once calculated to impress the individual with a due regard for his maker, to beget in him a love for his fellow beings, and to give him becoming views of himself.

We not only assemble in order to offer up unto God those expressions of our feelings which the consideration of him as our creator, preserver, and governor demands, but we meet also for the purposes of instruction in the great principles of religion natural and revealed, and in what relates to our duty to God and to our neighbour.

In order the better to attain those ends for which religious societies have been formed, persons have been selected in every period of the christian church, for the purpose of conducting the
public

public services of religion, and who have been usually entrusted with the main part of the business of instruction. These, in the primitive churches, were called, from their being, in general, aged persons, elders or presbyters; or from the nature of their office bishops, though this latter term became very early appropriated to one of the presbyters, who was the president of the presbytery. No officers in the christian church are to be regarded as of divine appointment, those which any society deems to be best calculated to promote its edification, it is at full liberty to set up. Care, however, must here be taken, as in all like cases, that no more power be vested in these officers than is necessary for the end already mentioned, or it will certainly be abused, and prove detrimental to those to whom it is entrusted, as well as to those by whom it has been imprudently delegated.

It has been before observed, that one part of the minister's province is to conduct the devotions of the congregation. As to the manner in which he is to assist in this part of our religious services, the christian world is somewhat divided. Some think that he should be the mouth of the congregation in the solemnity of prayer, that he should address the Deity in its name, agreeably to the practice which prevails among you. Others hold that he should only lead the devotions of the society, at the same time that each individual, by means of a form, is to bear a part, and audibly to assist in the service. Premising, that either practice has appeared to me

to contribute equally to edification, when properly executed, I, however, frankly give it as my opinion, that the latter, that in which each worshipper audibly assists in the service, is on several grounds preferable. In the case where the minister is the sole mouth of the congregation, it too often happens, that the people forget that they are to worship, they are too much disposed to consider this as exclusively the business of the minister, and not at all theirs, to regard themselves merely as spectators in the scene, and no ways actors, and thus the primary, and certainly the most important of the ends for which we meet together, is, in a great measure, defeated. On the contrary, where liturgies are in use, this evil is guarded against, the people cannot possibly fall into the same mistake, and are therefore less likely to be guilty of the inattention and remissness which are the effects of it. Forms give men a better opportunity to fit themselves for the solemnity of worship, as they can familiarize themselves beforehand with the sentiments which they are going to express to their adorable creator. As the minister, even where liturgies are adopted, is at liberty before sermon to make use of free prayer, or a composed form of his own, in which he may improve recent transactions, and adapt the worship to the existing state of things, and also after sermon to suit his petitions to the subject of his discourse, that mode appears to me, in addition to the advantages peculiar to itself, to secure those likewise of that which is followed by us, while, at the same time, it guards against its inconveniences.

conveniences. Besides, the mode to which we have been accustomed seems to give too much importance to the minister, to distinguish him more than is becoming from his brethren, from the other members of the society, it being clear that every thing having this tendency should as much as possible be guarded against.* It is not, however, my design at present to enter into the merits of this much debated question, which you may think it right to turn over in your minds in the interval between this, and the time of your entering into your new place of worship. To me your decision can cause no difficulties, as the advantages which strike me as attending the use of liturgies, are such as affect the people rather than the ministers.

The business of instruction, the other end for which we assemble together, may with more propriety be, in a greater degree, entrusted to the minister. Though the functions of its officers are altogether to be determined by the society for the benefit of which they are exercised, so that these may be enlarged or limited according as it may judge that the exercise of them will contribute to edification, still, as things are, it would seem expe-

* Were this mode to be generally adopted amongst us, it might connect us more with the liberal members of the establishment, dispose many among them to join us, and lead to a reformation in their liturgy. We should also be more in a situation to avail ourselves of the services of those clergymen who secede from the church on account of its doctrines. I do not mention these as arguments for the plan, but as casual advantages which might attend it. It is known that there have been several churchmen who, dissatisfied with the articles of the church of England, have been deterred from coming among the Dissenters on account of their not having liturgies.

dient, to leave to ministers the business of instruction, as is at present the case among all denominations of christians. This appears to be the best method of preserving pure the christian doctrines, and of guarding against that deluge of barbarism and ignorance which in past ages over-run the christian world. This calamity could not have happened, had caution been taken by societies to provide themselves with able and well-informed ministers.

Instruction is that to which the whole force of ministers should be directed, it is their great business, that alone which renders their existence, as a distinct set of men, either useful or desirable. Instruction should be communicated both in a private and public manner.

Private instruction fell at one time into almost entire disuse in this country, particularly among christians of our description; the reasons of this, you well know. The ministers, when they saw reason to discard the doctrines of the *Assembly's Catechism*, found that the most easy method to effect a change in the minds of the congregations in which they officiated, was by omitting catechising altogether. Happy for the cause of rational religion would it have been, if this omission, never wholly justifiable, had ceased, when the pretence for it no longer existed. Whatever palliations the conduct of the ministers of that day may admit of, it is plain those of the present have none under which to shelter themselves;

themselves; besides, that they discern more fully the ill consequences which are inseparable from this unhappy neglect. It cannot therefore fail to be made up by any who prefer not their ease to the most urgent calls of duty, who are not absolutely indifferent to the cause which they have espoused. Not to lay stress upon this practice, is not to be sensible of the importance of learning well the first principles of things of great concernment, and to be ignorant of the method by which alone this can be done. The attention paid to catechizing in the primitive church far exceeded any thing of the kind in modern times. The practice was revived at the reformation and followed up with zeal, and it is made much more an object of in every christian country, than in our own. My Christian Friends, you must know how to appreciate its value, as it has been conducted among you with exemplary diligence and marked success. I hope that it will be still carried on among you with equal zeal, that it will continue to receive from you the same countenance and support, and that other christian societies will in this particular imitate you.

The importance of catechizing will be more readily discerned, if the object of it, and the good effects that flow from it be stated.

Its leading object is to give young persons a clear and comprehensive knowledge of the evidences and doctrines of religion, both natural and revealed,

revealed, of the foundation and principles of our duties, both moral and religious; a connected view of the divine dispensations, and an insight into scripture and ecclesiastical history. On each of these heads, our language abounds with excellent treatises, these, we may be assured, were not designed to enlarge and to adorn the minds of a few individuals, but to diffuse as widely as possible the information they contain. There is no branch of our duty of which we seem so little sensible, as the obligation under which we are, to diffuse knowledge, our efforts should never cease, till this becomes as universal in its extent and influence as the air we breathe, or the light that encircles us.

Youth, trained in the way now proposed, will acquire habits of employing its thoughts upon the noblest subjects, will always find new resources in its own contemplations, will not only, itself, derive profit from its knowledge, but have constant opportunities of being serviceable to others; will be fortified against the attacks of infidelity, the terrors of superstition, and the delusions of religious enthusiasm; alike free from scepticism on the one side, and from dogmatism on the other; it will regard religion more as a rule of conduct, than as a subject of disputation; it will be more solicitous to display its virtues, than to make a parade of the sentiments which distinguish it, or the denomination under which it classes. Amid a laudable ardour to attain just views of the grounds and principles of religion, let us ever be mindful, that he is
the

the greatest proficient in this divine science, who drinks deepest into its spirit, who observes most uniformly and scrupulously its grand and leading requisitions, who directs his utmost efforts, whose sole and constant aim it is, to excel in its practice.

This method does credit to our ingenuousness, it shews to the world that we wish not to impose on ourselves or others, so that if we have fallen into error, it must be allowed that this happened to us while we were taking more than ordinary precautions to guard against it; for if the course here proposed be properly gone through, there are few persons who will not be able to separate what is plausible from what is solid; what is imaginary from what is real; what is a corruption of a doctrine, from the doctrine itself, an ingenious accommodation from a real prediction. If this be not the way, there can be none, by which we may escape error, and attain the knowledge of the truth. In following it, prejudices indeed may lose their hold, long established errors may fall into discredit, but the genuine truths of religion will rest unshaken. Enlightened men have ever regarded the detection of error as an important service, not only as the sole source of the lamentable wanderings into which men have frequently fallen, not only because it forms an impenetrable veil, which excludes from us the light and warmth which the rays of truth convey into the mind; but also of moment to be removed, as it is the principal support

port of those arts and devices, by which ill-designing persons, under the mask of sanctity, have led the world blindfold, and carried into execution their schemes of oppression.

Had religion any thing to apprehend from enquiry, it would not be worthy of being received by a rational being, but our experience and our observation assure us that it courts this test. Those who have examined it the most, who have laboured the most to strip it of the additions that have been made to it, and to represent it as it is in itself, deprived of meretricious embellishments, have been its most zealous advocates, as well as some of its brightest ornaments.

Another advantage attendant upon this practice is, that by preparing the minds of persons for it, it renders public instruction far more beneficial. Without a previous acquaintance with the elements of religion, such as, generally speaking, can only be attained in the manner already pointed out, very plain discourses from the pulpit will be but ill understood, and be productive of little effect. It will be also the less necessary, there to treat on the abstruse parts of religion, these having been attended to in the private lectures. Hence our discourses may be allowed to take a more popular turn, to consist very much of warm and animated exhortations founded upon first principles, which may then be taken for granted, as having been taught in another place.

In

In these public services it is our duty to take all proper pains to select improving and edifying topics; to treat them in the spirit of humility, meekness, and candour; to endeavour to impress our own minds with their importance, that we may recommend them to others with zeal and earnestness; to take all fair methods in our power to render our discourses interesting, above all to make them plain, that they may be attended to, and understood.

It is also the business of ministers to exemplify in their conduct the virtues and graces of that religion, which it is their employment to recommend, this is the most arduous and essential part of all. Without some success in this way, they cannot expect their other services, however ably discharged, to turn to any great account. As it should be the earnest and constant aim of ministers, not to lessen the effects of their labour, so should it be that of those who attend on their ministry, to make all proper allowances for the imperfections of their instructors; rather than unworthily take advantage of them, to pray almighty God that they fail not in this most important part of their character.

The sketch now given of the ministerial employment is sufficient to shew that it is an arduous and a difficult one; arduous and difficult from the various furniture which the proper exercise of it renders necessary, from the exertions which it requires, and the various duties which are connected with

with it. But this is not all; it is attended in some situations with great and peculiar discouragements. There are cases in which it draws down on the individual who discharges it, the frowns of power, the discountenance of authority and the hatred of the multitude. This is too generally the lot of all those who have the misfortune to hold opinions different from those adopted by the civil magistrate, and who have principle enough to follow their inward convictions. I can now only state the fact, to trace its causes would lead indeed to a wide field, they lie deeper than many are aware of, they proceed from the very essence of the civil constitution of the dominant sect of the country.

A person not versed in the transactions of modern times, a stranger to the policy of courts, to the interests of priests, and the want of discrimination which still prevails among the bulk of mankind, would conclude, that nothing could be more harmless than for men of similar religious views to assemble together for the purpose of worshipping their God in the manner that appeared to them most just, and to follow the means which they deemed best calculated to increase their knowledge and to fortify their virtue; nothing more inoffensive than for a man to undertake and execute an office which a society of such persons should deem calculated to answer the ends of its incorporation. At the one, or at the other, it might be supposed there could be no person who would take umbrage. It might be imagined that the different modes
adopted

adopted by different men to express their homage to their maker, would no way affect their temporal interest, neither brand them with disgrace, nor yet confer upon them any civil distinction. Matters are, however, far otherwise. The man who follows his private judgment in religion to the disregard of human authority, is subjected to sundry legal incapacities, and is made on all occasions to feel the inferiority which is inseparable from a state of degradation, a circumstance which to a generous mind, having a high sense of honour, and conscious of every thing that is upright and dignified in its conduct and views, is not the least considerable of the evils entailed upon non-conformity. A man may very well bear the idea of never sustaining any public employment, yet he may not find it easy to put up with the superiority which in the ordinary intercourse of life, is assumed over him, as one whom the law marks out as unworthy of being, on any occasion trusted in the service of his country, by such as have no title to this superiority, except what they derive from the religious opinions which they profess to hold*.

* In stating these grievances, it is far from my intention to intimate a wish to have them again laid before the legislature. Indeed I hope we shall hear no more of Test Act applications, Unitarian petitions, or any such petty matters, that we shall come no more forward but on questions of general liberty, such as interest the community at large. We had better wait the decision of a fair representation of the people. As an individual I should regard the refusal of so venerable an authority, more pleasing than would be the gratification of our utmost wishes from a parliament constituted as ours, at present, is. Our ancestors have been justly blamed for availing themselves of the dispensing power claimed by James II. even to be freed from persecution. Shall we not, in the estimation of posterity, incur similar blame, should we suffer any of our particular concerns to be brought forwards to the detriment of the attempts now making to regain to the people at large their lost, or their neglected rights?

This

This being our situation, these being the circumstances in which we find ourselves, what is the line of conduct which wisdom points out as what we ought to follow? Is it not to take extraordinary care to lay in store those consolations, which the approbation of conscience, which good intentions and which integrity can furnish us with? It is likely to be some time before the voice of justice in our behalf will be heard, for until those who are in the habits of lightly alleging heavy charges against us resolve to inform themselves with some accuracy as to the grounds there are for them, it will be in vain that we make solemn declarations that we are not actuated upon by a love of singularity, that we are disposed to make reasonable sacrifices for the sake of unanimity, that we would not, for slight reasons, refuse communion with any who bear the christian name; that we dissent because the church requires we should lay, at her feet, the right of private judgment; because she demands that in order to attain a place among her ministers, we should declare that we have a light to guide us in our actions, and in our conceptions of things, different from what we derive from human means, namely, that which comes by supernatural communication from the Almighty; that we should swear to tenets which in our opinion shock reason, subvert good morals, and discredit revelation. While this is the case, we call upon those who represent non-conformity as a crime, to consider well, whether the blame lies with those who dissent, or with those who require such hard terms, and who, tenaciously, adhere
to

to them, when every consideration of justice, of expediency, and of regard for religion should have led them to favour material alterations.

This is the language we hold to the advocates of the hierarchy. To another, and very different set of opponents, namely, unbelievers, who are fond of making us the objects of their wit and satire, I would wish here to address a few observations ; and to take this opportunity of declaring to them, that did our profession require of us to teach a single thing which lessened the force of moral obligation—which tarnished one solitary virtue—which checked one generous aspiration—which deadened one amiable feeling—which diminished the sum of human happiness—which directed the mind to usages that debase it, or which excited in it flights that derange it ;—were the tendency of our employment to render men morose, uncharitable, or indifferent to social duties,—let them be assured that we should quit our present occupations, that we should betake ourselves to those where industry is more amply rewarded, where the best intentions are less apt to be misconstrued, and where esteem is not withheld from those who merit it. To this fraternity we may with truth and justice say, when our youth forsake our assemblies to join your tents, whatever you may think, our concern arises not from the loss of the support which they might have rendered to our cause, nor yet from mortification at their disclaiming our opinions, and their neglecting our obser-

C

vances ;

vances; the true cause of our lamentation is, their exchanging devotion for profaneness, virtue for a contempt of, and a disregard to, principle; a desire of knowledge and instruction, for the perverseness of scepticism; christian humility, for pride and conceit; temperance and decency of conduct, for excesses which disgrace a reasonable being, and deprive him of every source of rational enjoyment. Had we reason to conclude, that those who thus desert us, had before their eyes the fear of God, though never seen in his temples—did we find that they discharged every duty of a good man and of a virtuous citizen, though acting from motives different from ours, we should cherish them as brethren, and withhold from them no mark of our esteem and respect. Our societies, Sirs, are not assemblies whose bond of union is an absurd dogma; they consist not of persons who would compound for their vices by religious observances; but are made up of men whose object it is to advance in holiness and purity of life, and to discharge their consciences by rendering unto God the honest homage of the heart: nor are their ministers persons who consume their time in idleness, nor yet in the pursuits of mean self-interest; they are men, whose occupation it is, to communicate instructions which elevate the sentiments, and which enlarge the mind; to place within the reach of their fellow creatures the advantages of an enlightened age; to inculcate lessons which have a tendency to render men amiable as relations, beneficent and obliging as neighbours, peaceable

peaceable and patriotic as citizens, and to accelerate the arrival of those happy times, when the gospel shall have its full influence on the minds of men.

From this digression I return again to the consideration of our situation as nonconformists: its evils are not limited to legal incapacities, and to the inconveniencies which must inevitably attend a degradation established by law. These evils have consequences; which consequences several of you have experienced. In reading your history, posterity will learn, that, even as far down as our time, persecution had a being. I blush for my country, for my species, and for the age in which I live, when, carrying myself in imagination down the stream of time, I behold distant generations perusing the records of our days, and learning that near the close of the eighteenth century, persecution had appeared in all its horrors, displayed its usual fury, and committed its wonted ravages; when I observe the curious of future ages remarking, that this desolating monster, odious to God, and to intelligences of every order, exposed its dread appearance to the view of men, not among a people where priests profess to be above the possibility of erring, where the sword of power unsheathes itself at the command of the church, and where the last arguments with heretics and dissenters, are chains and dungeons, confinements for life, and executions—that it was neither in Spain, nor in Portugal, nor in Italy, that this infernal fiend polluted by its ghastly presence the light of heaven—but, that it made its ap-

pearance in a country where the light of philosophy had long shone—in the midst of a nation renowned for its civil liberty, its impartial justice, and its enlightened policy—that it described its march, and hung up its trophies in a place celebrated for the perfection of its works of skill; for its ingenious inventions without number; for its prodigies of finished and sublime mechanism; for productions that gave a character to the country and to the age, known and admired in every quarter of the globe; famed for diffusing throughout the world the elegancies and conveniencies of civilized life, the happy devices of modern ingenuity and refinement;—that in a favourite seat of the arts, peaceable citizens had their dwellings violated, and made a prey to the flames; that a minister of religion, a philosopher, and an ardent lover, and distinguished benefactor of the arts, holding high rank in the world of letters, an honour to his country, an ornament to his age, as much distinguished by the simplicity of his manners, by unassuming and amiable behaviour, as by his talents and various labours, and in doing justice to whose merits language itself has been exhausted (I shudder when I think of it, at the loss which the world was so nigh sustaining, and the blot incapable of being effaced, which was so nigh to sully the reputation of my country) that this extraordinary man fell very little short of becoming the victim of blind barbarian bigotry. Such is the melancholy tale which, with others of a very opposite kind, the history of the present interesting period will have to transmit to posterity.

It

It is not my intention to investigate the causes of the late ever memorable calamities which this town experienced. I shall only observe, that the actors in the scene had an idea that they were serving the church; but surely they were its most indiscreet friends, or its secret, most determined foes, who could have recourse to, or in any way sanction such measures. For what is the language which such proceedings hold out to the cool, unprejudiced spectator? To him I appeal, be he churchman, or be he dissenter, or be he neither. Do they not evidently intimate, that that church which once was in such high consideration, by means of the learning, piety, and character of its members, is obliged to support itself by fire and sword? by spreading terror and dismay among its adversaries? Do not such proceedings, I ask, imply a confession, that the impregnable bulwark which the learned services, the theological ability, and exemplary virtues of its ministers, once formed around it, no longer exists, or can no longer be depended upon? Do not such proceedings give us to understand, that in order to prevent its falling under the weight of the arguments of its opponents; its sinking under the pressure of their learning, credit, and authority, it is constrained to avail itself of the most unwarrantable expedients; to sanction the public breach of law and order; to form an alliance with anarchy; to put arms into the hands of an uninformed misguided multitude, and to instigate it to violate the asylums of peace and innocence, and to pull down temples which conscience and religious principle had erected?

That this is the situation in which the church was placed by these displays of furious and destructive zeal, every man possessing common sense will allow, and will lament also, if he have in him the spirit of a christian, whatever be the party or denomination to which he belongs. Every friend the church has, I suspect, will hope, that she has not many among her sons, who have not grown ashamed of these, and the like methods of serving her cause.

Amidst the gloom which reflections on the unhappy events in question introduce into the mind, I feel myself cheered by hope, strong as the confidence of divine prophecy, that persecution has put forth its last effort, at least in our island; that, hereafter, it will be said, that it was at Birmingham that it received its final check, its utter discomfiture. I am strongly disposed to believe that reflections on the evils which it lately caused among us, have led all persons to hold it in complete abhorrence. If, however, I have the misfortune to be deceived, and if there exist an unhappy being in whose breast persecution still rankles, and who would be glad of an opportunity to break in on the religious liberty of his neighbour, him I would thus beg leave to address—Who art thou, daring mortal, who wouldst invade the prerogative of Deity, who wouldst place thyself on his throne, and wrest his vengeance from his hands, who not only prejudgest thy fellow creature, but who wouldst execute the sentence which thy presumption has pronounced against him?—If God permit his sun to shine, and his rain to descend,

scend, upon the dissenter from thy creed, whence, if he have done thee no hurt, hast thou commission to endanger his safety, or to disturb his peace? Has he published writings, has he delivered discourses, which, in thy judgment, are erroneous—what right hast thou to complain? Art thou obliged either to read his books, or to hear his sermons? Canst not thou, if thou thinkest proper, abstain from the one and the other? But it may be, that, safe thyself, thou art concerned for those who are misled by them. Have the goodness to make thyself easy on this head; give, I pray thee, to thy benevolent regards, another direction. Ask thyself in earnest, if these persons have any interest to be deceived? Consider, for a moment, if they have not judgments as sound, and discernment as clear, as those which thou possessest. Have they prejudices? and art thou free from them? Are they fallible? and is it impossible that thou shouldst have erred? Have they imperfections? and art thou without spot or wrinkle? If thou art above these infirmities, and if it becomes a being of thine exalted rank, then indeed, trample on thy neighbour, thine inferior; insult and persecute him in every possible shape, because he makes not thee his oracle, because he acts not by thy wisdom, and sees not with thy eyes; because he thinks not as thou dost.

Art thou then the privy councillor of Jehovah? Has the great Majesty of heaven and earth informed thee that he will carry on no intercourse but in thy language? that he will receive no homage, except

in houses which thou frequentest, and except the person offering it be habited as thou art, and practice thy gestures? Are all men who speak not with thy accent, who are not habited as thou art, whose ceremonials vary from thine, to be banished for ever from the divine presence? Are they in a state of condemnation, are they even unworthy to live, must they be the victims of the zeal with which thou burnest? But why wreck first thy vengeance on thy neighbours, whose language, whose outward form, and whose carriage differ not materially from thine? Rather than harass those who are agreed with thee in all the grand points of religion, why not begirt thyself with thine holy armour, for expeditions against nations and tribes who altogether reject thy faith, who hold not one article of thy creed, who spurn at thy ceremonies, and who despise thy sacraments?—Strange!—Do men, the nearer they approach to thee in their modes of thinking and acting, become in that proportion the more criminal? Or why display such malice and rancour against them, while the Hindú, the Mahomedan, and the Jew, have never felt the effects of thy displeasure? Why are thy fellow christians alone to smart under thy stroke, and to be afflicted by thine injustice? Didst thou ever reflect upon this thy conduct? But of serious and rational reflection thou must be incapable, or thou wouldst never act so absurd and wicked a part. I see thee eat, and drink, and share in pleasures like other men; nor does thy dialect bespeak intercourse with the Divinity: whence, then, thy warrant to set up thy judgment

ment above that of others, and to inflict punishment upon them because they see things differently from what thou dost? Whence hast thou this dreaded right, this awful prerogative? I visit the philosopher who, during a long life, has toiled in enquiry, who has employed great talents, and unremitting industry, in his search after truth; still, I perceive that he is modest and doubting; I see his hand hesitate, his pen tremble, when he commits to paper his conclusions on the points which he has most studied. I listen to the estimable sage; I hear him, in sweet and gentle accents, make the following honest confession:—*God knows, says he, I still may be wrong, I still may be deceived; truth may have eluded all my researches. I, however, humbly thank the Almighty, that his favour is the reward not of rectitude of opinion, but of rectitude of intention; that he seeks the heart to be right, and not the understanding to be unclouded. I reckon upon his gracious acceptance, because my mind has been pure, though my judgment may have erred; because my views have been upright, though my conceptions may have been wrong.* This is the language of the philosopher; the undisguised declaration of the indefatigable searcher of wisdom. In contrast with this angelic character, what a monster dost thou, O hideous persecutor, appear! Between beings of the same species, can such immense difference have place, can such vast dissimilarity obtain? Unseemly animal, how canst thou shew thy face in a world that is the residence of so pleasing an object? Retire then from the society of men; screen thyself from the eyes of an enlightened public;

public; seek for associates among the wild inhabitants of the desert; even their society is too good for thee; they never had reason to controul them. In their greatest excesses, they do but follow their instinct; they do but obey a natural appetite; whereas thou followest an impulse which nature never gave thee; and, in opposition to every principle in thy constitution, makest it thy pleasure to strike terror, and thy delight to commit cruelty. If the opinion of thy fellow creatures have no weight with thee, I warn thee to dread the vengeance of that Power whose prerogatives thou impiously invade, but which never are invaded with impunity; the remorse of that conscience whose whispers thou disregardest. Fear to entail heavy curses on thy posterity. Look into a neighbouring country, trace back its former history; compare what thou there findest with present events. See there the successors of those who were instrumental in harrassing in every possible shape, and in banishing their country, useful and industrious citizens, themselves persecuted and banished: see there oppressors, whose enormity has rarely been paralleled, suddenly, as if by miraculous interposition, stripped of their power, reduced to a situation the most disconsolate, and treated as the scum of the earth. History abounds with awful lessons pertaining to thy case. Unfold its page, and if from no more respectable motive, at least from dread of the secret vengeance which hovers over the persecutor, learn to be tolerant; to suffer thy neighbour to follow his opinions without pain or molestation.

It may be expected that I should state my motives for dwelling on these subjects; for calling your attention to topics of this nature. This I have done, because it appeared to me to be an impropriety, and also to argue a tameness unworthy of a man, to have commenced my relation to you as your minister, which happened in consequence of the events to which I have alluded, without taking some notice of these events; and it was not in my power to recur to them, without testifying my abhorrence of them, in the strongest language of which I am master. Let none however infer, that it is my design to blow up the embers which, I trust, are well nigh extinguished, to foster the heat which, I hope, is every day allaying, to kindle fresh animosities. Ill would such an intention agree with the character under which I appear, and still less so with the predominant inclinations of my bosom. I have only claimed the privilege of expressing the disapprobation which I feel, in looking back on events which are a disgrace to the country, without implicating any one in the guilt of being concerned in them. I have only testified my abhorrence of the persecutor, without pointing to any one as being the man. While I can wield a pen—while my mouth can enuntiate a sentence, I shall never spare intolerance and persecution. At the same time, in conjunction with this, be it ever my aim, be it ever my highest pleasure, to recommend to beings of the same species, to citizens of the same community, to inhabitants of the same vicinity, and surely to professors of the same religion, as
to

to all its grand points—cordiality. Cordiality among men, is the will of heaven; it is that which does them the most honour; it is the most striking proof of their wisdom, and is the only basis of the permanent happiness of society. But I shall be told, that cordiality, however valuable, is not to be expected while differences of opinion continue among men that these must be done away, before we can hope for this inestimable blessing. If that indeed be the case, farewell cordiality; she can never be an inhabitant of earth; she can never be a resident on this unhappy planet, doomed to be the prey of eternal discord. For, survey the face of the globe, cast thine eye on its minuted divisions, and, even in the most inconsiderable of these, thou wilt look in vain for uniformity of sentiment; the shades of dialect are less varied than the shades of opinion. If persons, disagreeing, are to proceed exterminating each other, till those only holding the same views are left to see the light of heaven, of men there will remain none but tyrants and hypocrites; and of opinions, those only that are barbarous and slavish. Who is there that is not shocked at these inferences, fairly deducible from persecuting maxims? What alternative is there then, but to reject them with the abhorrence they deserve, and to allow that differences of opinion form no just cause for animosity of any kind; that though these should exist to ever so great a height, yet, while there is found among men a sense of justice, a benevolent temper, there is a basis left, not only for mutual good understanding, but for friendship and esteem. Differences of
 opinion

opinion will always exist ; vain is the wish to make them disappear, vain the attempt to remove them. But why, on account of these, harass our neighbour, and endeavour to render him unhappy? Why, because we cannot all see things in the same light, labour to swell the catalogue of ills of which man is heir, of those appendages which heaven itself was unable to separate from his finite nature, from that rank which she has assigned him in the scale of existence? Could I by a single wish annihilate all differences of opinion, I would not indulge that wish. Were I sure that every opinion I hold was right, and could I, by wishing, bring over all men to my opinion, I should most religiously refrain from wishing it ; because I see, that differences of opinion form part of the plan of heaven ; that the period when the ends they answer are accomplished, is not yet arrived. God designed them to be a blessing, it is our pride and our perverseness that convert them into a curse ; they afford exercise for the most amiable virtues, for those which most embellish the human character, for charity and mutual forbearance. Differences of opinion give rise to generous emulation ; they form incitements, in minds well principled, to beneficial efforts of every kind ; to every thing that can give weight and authority to sentiment, and dignity to conduct. The time when they shall be no longer necessary even in our world, may come ; but it is at present at a remote distance, and is only to be hastened by rational means, by calm and temperate discussion,

and

and not by kindling the flames of strife and contention !

We differ as christians, let us engage in no contests which extinguish the spirit of a christian, or which does it violence. Let the combats in which we appear be such as do not dishonour our profession, as the disciples of a gentle, humble, and forbearing master ! Is there misery to be relieved—is there good to be done—can we render ourselves brighter examples of every virtue—can we make sacrifices to the happiness of others ? In this field let us appear ; here let us struggle for the prize. On the ground of doing good, let the course where we run, the race where we strive for the palm, be measured ; here fix the goal which we strive to reach. And may a spirit of disinterestedness prevail over that of self ; may narrowness make way for liberality, rancour for christian charity, hatred for love and fraternity, in all communions, and among all sects and parties. And let us all address our prayers to the Fountain of Light, the Source of Intelligence, to Him who is the Author of order, peace, and harmony, and in whom are the springs of all goodness and clemency, that he would behold with compassion his imperfect creatures ; that he would give them right notions of their duty ; that he would convince them, that in judging of the motives and opinions of others, they wrest the reins of government from his hands ; that he would make them sensible of their being fallible ; that the error
which

which they impute to their brother, may be their own; and hence, as well as from a fear of incurring his sore displeasure for judging others, may they regard without hatred or animosity, their neighbour, who differs from them; that they may be forgiven, and that their souls may be saved in the great day of the Lord; that we may all live in safety, and be permitted in the use of the faculties which God has given us, and of the means which the present state of society furnishes, to carry on those schemes for our mutual welfare and advancement in perfection, which it is the design of Divine Providence to bring about.

Consider well what you have heard; and may God grant us a right understanding in all things. Amen.

THE END.

BOOKS written by **A WELCH FREEHOLDER**, and sold by
J. Johnson, No. 72, St. Paul's Church-Yard, London, and
J. Thompson, Moor-street, Birmingham.

THOUGHTS ON THE RIOTS AT BIRMINGHAM. *Price 6d.*

STRICTURES on a Pamphlet, entitled, *Thoughts on the late Riot at Birmingham*: printed by *Sewell, Cornhill, London.* *Price 6d.*

LETTER TO THE BISHOP OF ST. DAVID'S; second edition.
Price 6d.

VINDICATION OF HIS LETTER. *Price 1s. 6d.*

REASONS FOR UNITARIANISM; OR THE TRUE PRIMITIVE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE. Addressed to the serious Consideration of the Inhabitants of the Diocese of St. Davids. *Price 2s. 6d.*

AN ADDRESS TO HER ROYAL HIGHNESS THE DUTCHESS OF YORK, AGAINST THE USE OF SUGAR. *Price 6d.*

Shortly will be published,

THE REVOLUTION IN FRANCE, AND THE PROGRESS OF LIBERTY, considered in connection with **OUR IDEAS OF PROVIDENCE**, and of the Improvement of Human Affairs.

